

38
World

TIME
15 July 1985

Seeking the "Tonic Effect"

Now that he has consolidated his power, Mikhail Gorbachev is feeling confident enough to meet with Ronald Reagan at a Geneva summit in November. But last week's announcement was downplayed in both Moscow and Washington. In the past, the problem with summitry has been that it raised expectations to unrealistic heights. This time the problem is the opposite: the Reagan-Gorbachev meeting raises questions of why the two leaders are bothering to get together at all.

The White House had made no secret about its desire for Gorbachev to come to the U.S. The Soviets said *nyet*: a meeting would have to be on neutral territory. Some Americans favored a get-acquainted session. Nancy Reagan in particular felt that if her husband could, as she once put it, "just talk to those people," it would help. But others feared that unless substantive success was guaranteed in advance, the encounter might exacerbate distrust and discord. For that reason, the U.S. would have preferred a summit with preordained results in the form of a major new agreement, such as the treaties limiting strategic arms signed at the Nixon-Brezhnev meeting in 1972 or at the Jimmy Carter-Brezhnev summit in 1979, the most recent encounter between a Soviet leader and a U.S. President.

But the superpowers may be too far apart on all the central issues for the gaps to be closed between now and November. The Geneva negotiations on nuclear and space arms are due to recess next week with no sign of any progress. Gorbachev has publicly threatened to pull out of the arms talks unless the U.S. gives up its attempt to develop a space-based antiweapons system, known as Star Wars, or the Strategic Defense Initiative. Soviet Spokesman Vladimir Lomeiko last week indicated that Gorbachev will directly press his opposition to SDI with Reagan.

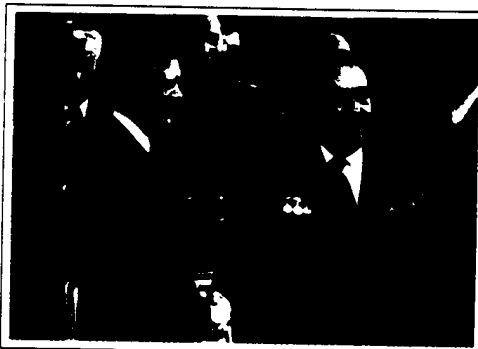
On other issues as well, obstacles appear to outweigh opportunities. The Administration would like to loosen some restrictions on U.S.-Soviet trade, but the Pentagon is concerned about Moscow's acquiring American technology that could have military applications. The two sides have been dickering for years over opening new consulates, but the recent wave of spy scandals in the U.S. has increased FBI concerns about Soviet diplomatic offices providing cover for KGB agents. Also, Soviet and American diplomats have been discussing cooperation in regions where the superpowers support opposing forces: Afghanistan, the Middle East and southern Africa. But these talks are a long way from producing any agreements.

So why meet? The answer, a number of Washington officials suggest, is the "tonic effect" of simply announcing and preparing for a summit. Henry Kissinger used to say that one of the principal purposes in high-level, high-visibility encounters is to force the bureaucracies on both sides to stop dithering over problems and start thinking about solutions. The Reagan Administration is sharply divided within its own ranks over whether to seek an arms-control compromise that would curtail Star Wars in exchange for significant reductions in Soviet offensive weapons. Advocates of such a deal, who include moderates in the White House and the State Department, are hopeful that the mere fact of having to prepare for a summit will strengthen their hand against Pentagon hard-liners. No one, however, expects a dramatic shift in either the American or Soviet stance before, during or immediately after the summit.

As Secretary of State George Shultz noted last week, the meeting should be seen as "part of a process." Translation: Administration moderates hope that come November, Reagan and Gorbachev will find enough flexibility in each other's positions that an agreement may be possible later on, perhaps before the end of Reagan's term in 1988.

For that to happen, the leaders may have to make some tough decisions, face to face, at the summit. By virtue of "the interplay between them," said Shultz, "they will construct their own agenda to a certain extent." Perhaps it will be more ambitious and promising than the one being planned by their underlings. It could hardly be less so.

—By Strobe Talbott



Carter and Brezhnev in Vienna for 1979 SALT II talks

ARTHUR GRACE